

Recognition of Human Freedom in Schelling's Interpretation of *Oedipus* as Tragedy: from *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* to *Philosophy of Art* *

YAHATA Sakura

Toyo University, Tokyo / University of Cambridge, Cambridge

Introduction

F. W. J. Schelling presents his position on the philosophy of art in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Art* (delivered 1802–03 in Jena and 1804–05 in Würzburg), in which he discusses the absolute in the form of art based on his philosophy of identity. In the same context, he develops a theory of genre that places drama as the highest form among the literary arts, and he calls tragedy in particular the highest representation of the essence of art. He reflects on the completeness of his tragedy theory and its place in the theory of genre and asserts that this is a chapter “worthy of publication” (*druckwürdig*).¹ Thus, an approach to Schelling’s philosophy of art requires an exploration of his theory of tragedy.

This paper focuses on Schelling’s account of Greek tragedy. He regards Prometheus as “the true archetype of tragedy” (AAII, 6, 1, 383/SWV 709) and gives equal praise to Sophocles’s *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He finds that Greek tragedy expresses an absolute indifference to questions of freedom and destiny through the hero’s resistance to fate and his own destruction. Tragedy, which expresses the simultaneous conflict between and indifference of freedom and destiny or necessity, is the highest presentation aimed at by the philosophy of art. At the same time, however, Schelling finds the expression of freedom in the man who challenges fate and falls, and characterizes Greek tragedy as the expression of “the greatest idea and the highest victory of freedom” (*der größte Gedanke und der höchste Sieg der Freiheit*) (AAII, 6, 1, 373/SWV 697). How can freedom be recognized in an indifference between freedom and necessity? This paper attends to *Oedipus Tyrannus* and interprets Schelling’s investigation of human freedom as rooted in his theory of tragedy.

The sources for this paper are Schelling’s *Philosophy of Art* and his early work *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795) (*Philosophical Letters*), which articulates Schelling’s basic concept of tragedy. First, this paper elucidates the discussion of Greek tragedy in

* This paper is based on the Japanese version printed in *Bigaku* 67, No. 1 (2016): 25–36, published by the Japanese Society for Aesthetics.

¹ From Schelling’s *Overview of my future handwritten Manuscripts (Übersicht meines künftigen handschriftlichen Nachlasses)* in: Fuhrmans 1960, 14. Peter Szondi describes Schelling’s theory of tragedy: “since Aristotle there has been a poetics of tragedy. Only since Schelling there has been a philosophy of tragedy” (Szondi 1961, 151), and “with this interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and of Greek tragedy in general, the history of the theory of tragedy begins” (Szondi 1961, 157f.).

Philosophical Letters, where Greek tragedy is considered as the art form that can realize human freedom. Second, this paper summarizes the essence and form of tragedy as given in the *Philosophy of Art* and analyzes Schelling's interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and its symbol of the hero. In this way, this paper concludes that the theory of freedom shown in the voluntary acceptance of punishment in *Philosophical Letters* becomes the basis of the theory of tragedy in the *Philosophy of Art* and, its developed form, leads to the expression and symbol of the tragic sublime. This paper reads Schelling's theory of tragedy as a theory of human freedom.

1. Possibility of Human Freedom in Greek Tragedy in *Philosophical Letters* on *Dogmatism and Criticism*

The *Philosophical Letters*,² published anonymously in 1795, is work in the form of letters, which Schelling wrote as a theology student in Tübingen. It is in part a criticism of the orthodox theological thinking he encountered at Tübingen, where the existence of God was regarded as a "supernatural fact" and happiness was "a reward for virtue."³ Schelling examines two philosophical systems that differ from this orthodox theology, dogmatism (*Dogmatismus*), by which he refers to Spinoza's philosophy, and criticism (*Kriticismus*), by which he refers to Kant and Fichte's philosophy.⁴ Schelling enthusiastically accepts Kant's philosophy, which investigates the conditions of possibility of human cognition, but he is dissatisfied with it on the following points: Kant's critical philosophy is not a complete philosophical system based on a single fundamental principle that unifies the theoretical and practical reason, that is, nature and freedom, while maintaining their separation. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the ideas of the unconditioned (God, freedom, and immortality) are unrecognizable and are postulated only to make room for faith in God. Under the influence of Fichte, Schelling considers the unconditioned as the absolute I, the unifying principle of subject and object, while, at the same time, he presents Spinoza's philosophy as an alternative to Kant's.

Spinozism, first expressed in Jacobi's *Spinoza Letters* (1785), had a great influence on young Schelling. In his letter to Hegel of February 4, 1795, Schelling calls himself a Spinozist and writes that "for Spinoza, the world (the absolute object opposed to the subject) was everything, for me it is the *I* [*Ich*]" (AAIII, 1, 22). The difference between dogmatism and criticism lies in the question whether one departs from "the absolute object or not-I [*Nicht-Ich*]" and "the absolute I" (Ibid.). Schelling integrates Fichte's idea of the absolute I and Spinoza's idea of God as presented in *Ethics* into the concept of the absolute. Spinoza's philosophy, which presents God as the only substance, has potential to transcend the limitations of Kant's epistemology, which is restricted

² This is the text published in Bd. 2, Heft. 3 and in Bd. 3, Heft. 3 in the *Philosophical Journal of a Society of German Scholars* (*Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*) edited by Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (AAI, 3, 3).

³ Matsuyama 2014, 45–47. According to Matsuyama, orthodox theologians were interpreting Kant's proof of God's existence to their advantage and regarding God's existence as a supernatural fact; by doing so, they undermined the critical spirit of reason and took advantage of its weakness.

⁴ Schelling distinguishes between *Dogmatismus* and *Dogmaticismus*, and he calls Spinoza's philosophy an example of the former and Tübingen orthodox theology to the latter (AAI, 3, 7–9).

to subjectivity, and unify theoretical and practical reason.

Schelling identifies problems with both Spinozan and Kantian or Fichtean philosophy and explores a position for himself that is neither dogmatism nor criticism but that can resolve the conflict between freedom and necessity. In the eighth letter of the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling asserts that Spinoza “*deceived himself*” (AAI, 3, 88/SWI 319) about intellectual intuition concerning the problems of the I and freedom. According to Schelling, Spinoza has objectified the intuition of self, and he believes himself identical with the absolute and therefore “lost in its nonfiniteness” through intellectual intuition (Ibid.). Schelling calls intellectual intuition the “intuition of self,” saying that “everything objective had vanished for him, in the intuition of himself” (Ibid.).

We can never get rid of our own selves. The ground for this lies in our absolute freedom, owing to which the *ego* [*Ich*] in us cannot be a *thing* [*Ding*], cannot be a *matter* [*Sache*] capable of objective determination. (AAI, 3, 89/SWI 320)

Intellectual intuition is the act of the self-intuition of the I. Absolute freedom as the essence of human beings resides in the ego. If the I is abandoned, as occurs in Spinoza, the absolute freedom present in the ego also disappears. Schelling regards “the acting ego” as “the *determined* and the *determining*” and acknowledges the self-determination of the I and intellectual intuition (Ibid.).

Spinoza, according to Schelling, presents the absolute state of beatitude in terms of intellectual self-intuition (AAI, 3, 91/SWI 322). Schelling quotes Proposition 42 of Part V of Spinoza’s *Ethics*: “*Beatitude* [*Seeligkeit*] is not the reward of virtue [*Lohn der Tugend*], it is virtue itself,” and rephrases it to say that what is established in intellectual intuition with beatitude is virtue itself (Ibid.). In the state of beatitude of intellectual intuition, all conflicts disappear, and all conflict between morality and happiness is resolved (Ibid.).

Morality itself cannot be the highest, it can be only an approximation of the absolute state, only a striving for absolute freedom which no longer departs from any law, yet which also does not know any law but the unalterable, eternal law of its own essence. If it is to be thought of as morally possible, *happiness* [*Glückseligkeit*] can be thought of only as an *approximation* [*Annäherung*] to a beatitude which no longer *differs* from morality and which *therefore* can no longer be a *reward* [*Belohnung*] of virtue. (AAI, 3, 91f./SWI 322)

Schelling criticizes orthodox theology through the above proposition. For Schelling, striving for the absolute state of absolute freedom, the essence of human beings, is morality, and morality and beatitude are identical. Therefore, “where *there is absolute freedom, there is absolute beatitude*” (AAI, 3, 94/SWI 324).

According to the ninth letter, “all philosophy demands absolute thesis as the goal of all synthesis,” but this thesis is thinkable only through “absolute identity,” hence both criticism and dogmatism “necessarily strive for absolute identity,” so both philosophies are combined (AAI, 3, 97f./SWI 327f.). The difference between the both philosophies is to be “intent *immediately* upon absolute identity of the *subject*” or to be “*immediately* intent upon the identity of an absolute

object" (AAI, 3, 98/SWI 328). Morality and happiness would be united in higher principle, that is, "the principle either of absolute being or absolute beatitude" (AAI, 3, 98f./SWI 328).

Schelling proposes that freedom and necessity are not opposing principles, just as the distinction between idealism and realism disappears when subject and object are identical.

He who has reflected upon freedom and necessity has found for himself that these two principles must be *united* in the absolute: *freedom*, because the absolute acts by unconditional autonomy [*Selbstmacht*], and *necessity*, because it acts only according to the laws of its own being, the inner necessity of its essence. In the absolute there is no longer any will that could have reality independently of those acts. Absolute freedom and absolute necessity are identical. (AAI, 3, 101/SWI 330f.)

Freedom and necessity are identical in the absolute, from the perspective of which, criticism and dogmatism are only distinguished in the way that they approach and realize the goal of the absolute identity of subject and object (AAI, 3, 103/SWI 332). However, neither system make the absolute "an object of *knowledge*," so they aim "to make the absolute, an object of *action*, or, to *demand* the *action* by which the absolute is realized" (AAI, 3, 103/SWI 333). Thus, the two systems are united in terms of how they realize the absolute, Schelling chooses a third way.

The realization of the absolute through action is shown in the unity of human freedom and the necessity of the objective world represented by art, especially tragedy. According to the tenth letter, the possibility of confronting an objective power that threatens our freedom and failing is no longer left to reason but is only found in tragedy, such as that of the Greeks (AAI, 3, 106/SWI 336). The contradiction between freedom of the subject and the objective power of fate can only be borne by "a mortal" (*ein Sterblicher*).

A mortal, designed by fate to become a malefactor and himself fighting *against* this fate, is nevertheless appallingly punished for the crime, although it was the deed of destiny! The *ground* of this contradiction, that which made the contradiction bearable, lay deeper than one would seek it. It lay in the contest between human freedom and the power of the objective world in which the mortal must succumb *necessarily* if that power is absolutely superior, if it is fate. And yet he must be *punished* for succumbing because he did not succumb *without a struggle*. That the malefactor who succumbed under the power of fate was *punished*, this tragic fact was the recognition [*Anerkennung*] of human freedom; it was the *honor* [*Ehre*] due to freedom. Greek tragedy honored human freedom, letting its hero *fight* against superior power of fate. (AAI, 3, 106f./SWI 336)

Voluntary acceptance of punishment means defeat by fate but remains a choice made by a free human will. Failing through the expression of this free will is the only path left for human freedom. Greek tragedy paradoxically proves the existence of human freedom through the hero's tragic fight against fate and his downfall, and it recognizes the existence of absolute freedom as the essence of the human, which is recognized by neither dogmatism nor criticism. It is the resolution of conflict and the realization of human freedom by one person in the tragedy that is "the

recognition of human freedom” and “a *great* thought” about freedom (AAI, 3, 107/SWI 336f.).

Schelling leaves open the possibilities of human freedom by regarding Greek tragedy as a recognition of human freedom through the hero’s downfall before the objectivity of fate. This perspective is precisely appropriate for the interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Peter Szondi assesses Schelling’s interpretation of Oedipus to find positive value in the protagonist’s attitude toward undertaking punishment.⁵ Juichi Matsuyama characterizes the “realization of freedom” in the fall of Oedipus as peripeteias a modern interpretation, understanding it as self-annihilation carried out in opposition to Kant’s concept of freedom.⁶ As these scholars point out, for Schelling human freedom appears in the seemingly negative moment when the tragic hero voluntarily accepts punishment and failure. This recognition of freedom is only shown by the ultimate choice in Greek tragedy, which is not shown in question of the two choices of Spinoza’s objective world and Kant’s freedom of the will. This recognition of freedom based on the idea of reversal is an original feature in Schelling’s theory of tragedy.

2. Conflict and Indifference between Freedom and Necessity in Tragedy in *Philosophy of Art*

In the *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling defines his approach to art in terms of the philosophy of identity, which develops both spirit and nature according to absolute reason. For Schelling, the philosophy of art argues the absolute in the form of art, so he defines the philosophy of art as follows: “the philosophy of *art is the science of the All in the form or potency of art*” (AAII, 6, 1, 114/SWV 368). Schelling holds that the absolute appears in the real or ideal world only when posited in different determinations, and the ideal determinations are to be understood as potency (*Potenz*) (AAII, 6, 1, 112/SWV 365). Schelling integrates the idea of potency into the mathematical meaning of exponentiation by repeating the same elements and constructions at higher stages, which he calls *Potenzierung*. The absolute remains always in the identity of the particular and the universal, but the work of art takes the form of an opposition of the particular and the universal (AAII, 6, 1, 116/SWV 370f.). Depending on whether they exist in the particular or in the universal, genres of art are divided into real unity and ideal unity; the plastic arts, which bring the infinite universal into finite things, fall into the former group, but the literary arts are in the latter group, as they bring the particular into the infinite. Genres of art can be classified by potency (*Potenzierung*) into those having real unity, ideal unity, and indifference of both: indicated by music, painting, and sculpture within the plastic arts, and lyrics, epic poetry, and drama in literary arts.

The three stages of potency indicate “particularity or difference,” “identity,” and “the universal and the particular are one” (AAII, 6, 1, 328/SWV 639). The lyric poem, the real form, is the “most subjective poetic genre,” and freedom is dominant in it, beginning with the particularity of subjectivity and ending with an objective portrayal (AAII, 6, 1, 328/SWV 640). By contrast, in the epic poem, the ideal form, the act as history is objectively described as within

⁵ Szondi 1961, 159.

⁶ Matsuyama 2014, 87–90.

the absolute identity, in which there is no struggle between human freedom and necessity of destiny, indicating pure necessity or pure identity (AAII, 6, 1, 369/SWV 691). Drama, at a third level of potency, expresses the unity of the particular and the universal. In the drama the action "is itself actually presented" (AAII, 6, 1, 369/SWV 692), that is, human actions are not portrayed in the narrative, but rather are presented in a performance. Drama is defined as the "final synthesis of all poesy" (Ibid.), being neither subjective nor objective, and tragedy is taken as the highest appearance of art, representing a complete indifference between the ideal and the real.

Schelling acknowledges the struggle against freedom and fate in tragedy and calls for an art form that is simultaneously subjective and objective. The essence of tragedy is defined in the chapter "On Tragedy" as follows.

The essence of *tragedy* is thus an actual and objective conflict between freedom in the subject on the one hand, and necessity on the other, a conflict that does not end such that one or the other succumbs, but rather such that both are manifested in perfect indifference as simultaneously victorious and vanquished. (AAII, 6, 1, 371/SWV 693)

The conflict between and unification of subject and object and of freedom and necessity, is a fundamental issue in the philosophy of identity and is a theme that is also common to the philosophy of art. The tragic hero strives to act through his own will, but his actions are already determined by the mighty and objective power of fate. Schelling acknowledges the fact of a conflict between freedom and necessity in human beings' attempt to realize their own freedom in opposition to fate, which is decisive, and finds the essence of tragedy to be in the way that this conflict ends in indifference.

For Schelling, the absolute indifference between freedom and necessity must "be symbolized" in and through human nature (AAII, 6, 1, 368/SWV 690). The human nature, in which freedom and necessity are bound up with one another, must be represented by individuals, who are called "persons" (*Personen*) (Ibid.). The indifference between freedom and necessity appears in the person, "who succumbs to necessity can elevate himself above it through the disposition [*Gesinnung*]" (AAII, 6, 1, 368/SWV 691). The German word *Gesinnung* refers to the individual's consciousness or pattern of thinking, but Schelling uses this word to refer to the good and courageous attitude of the protagonist's moral person as expressed in a tragedy. If the protagonist's mental attitude is brave and great, he accepts the misfortunes that come his way as fate and admits his guilt. Through the moral attitudes and actions of the protagonist, freedom becomes elevated to a being that can overcome the mighty inevitability that continues to threaten and dominate human beings. Thus, disposition is the principle that guides the moral actions of the subject. Against this background, we observe the influence of Kant's moral philosophy, which understands disposition as the maxim of the will to fulfill obligations according to moral laws.

The relationship between freedom and necessity, brought about by moral action through the hero's disposition, is not resolved when one of the two overcomes the other but is a seemingly contradictory state in which both overcome each other and are overcome at the same time. In resisting necessity, freedom raises itself to a position equal to that necessity and comes to appear as objective as the necessity. In this appearance, freedom and necessity, which had been separate

and opposed, appear having “equality in being” (*Gleichseyn*) (AAII, 6, 1, 368/SWV 690), without being equally distinct from each other. Schelling calls the state where freedom and necessity are equal in power and being absolute indifference. At this stage, the resistance of freedom to necessity no longer exists, and freedom appears as absolute freedom (AAII, 6, 1, 369/SWV 691). For Schelling, art is the reintegration of the originally identical through the separation of freedom and necessity and its presentation as indifference. Thus, art objectifies the absolute, the original identity, as true and absolute indifference, and tragedy is its highest expression (AAII, 6, 1, 368/SWV 690).

Schelling indicates that in what kind of tragedy, the struggle between freedom and necessity appears by considering what type of person in tragedy falls into misfortune. First, as tragedy does not occur if necessity determines the good, only “when necessity imposes *evil* [*das Uebele*]” does necessity appear to be in conflict with freedom (AAII, 6, 1, 371/SWV 694). Referring to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Schelling defines the persons and misfortunes that tragedy should represent. The tragic hero must be neither good, nor bad, nor very bad, but a person mediating between these who falls from very happy and well-regarded state into misfortune. The subject of tragedy is “a person who is exceptional as regards neither virtue nor justice [*Gerechtigkeit*], and who does not fall into misfortune as a result of wickedness [*Laster*] or crime [*Verbrechen*], but rather as a result of *error* [*Irrthum*]” (Ibid.). Only such a tragic subject can give rise to “sympathy” (*Mitleid*) or “fright” (*Schrecken*).⁷

This perspective, however, differs from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Aristotle requires that tragedy should show how the eminent men have passed into adversity through error (*ἀμαρτία*) and removes the necessity of fate or God from the plots of tragedy insofar possible as he can.⁸ Schelling, however, asserts that guilt does not come about through error, but “through the will of destiny and an unavoidable fate [*Verhängniß*]” or “by the vengeance [*Rache*] of the gods” (AAII, 6, 1, 372/SWV 695). To be touched by an unavoidable fate is “the highest possible misfortune [*Unglück*]” (Ibid.), and guilt comes from the beginning as inevitable.

In Schelling’s view of human beings, the actions of the hero are already determined by fate, even if they seem to be chosen by himself. No matter how a person tries to resist fate, freedom appears to have no choice but to succumb to overwhelming necessity. However, as freedom rises to parity with necessity, the struggle between freedom and necessity does not remain a conflict but ends in a state where “both are manifested in perfect indifference as simultaneously victorious and vanquished” (AAII, 6, 1, 371/SWV 693).

This is the greatest idea and the greatest victory of freedom: voluntarily to bear the

⁷ This characterization of the subject of tragedy is almost a word-for-word quotation from Chapter 13 of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. According to Aristotle, the best tragedies are complex, not simple, and represent fearful (*φοβερόν*) and pitiable (*ἐλεεινόν*) events. The plots of the finest tragedies do not show any of the following three cases: 1) changing from prosperity to adversity, 2) changing adversity to prosperity, and 3) the very wicked person’s falling from prosperity to adversity. This leaves only case: 4) the person in between these cases, such a person is someone not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into adversity not thorough evil and depravity, but through some kinds of error (1452b32–1453a12). For quotations from the *Poetics*, I quote from the OCT and give the page and line numbers from Bekker edition.

⁸ Cf. The translator’s note Nr. 9 to the Chapter 13, Matsumoto, N. and Oka, M. 2008, 166.

punishment for an unavoidable transgression in order to manifest his freedom precisely in the loss of that very same freedom, and to perish amid a declaration of free will.

This, as presented here as well as in my own *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, is the innermost spirit of the Greek tragedy. This is the basis for the reconciliation and harmony residing in that tragedy, the reason it does not devastate us, but rather leaves us feeling healed and, as Aristotle says, cleansed. (AAII, 6, 1, 373/SWV 697)

In addition to the paradoxical recognition of human freedom by its fall in the *Philosophical Letters*, a state of harmonious indifference must appear in tragedy. Here, we can observe Schelling's intention to incorporate the recognition of freedom in *Philosophical Letters* into tragedy found on the philosophy of identity in the *Philosophy of Art*. Juichi Matsuyama interprets Schelling's previously cited understanding of tragedy (AAII, 6, 1, 371/SWV 693) as containing double meaning, synthesizing a conflict between freedom and necessity as well as the indifference between them. Further, Matsuyama notes the appropriateness of *Eumenides* and *Oedipus at Colonus* for the philosophy of identity, which defines absolute identity as a fundamental principle; as *Prometheus Bound* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which Schelling considers to be archetypes of tragedy, do not fit the definition based on the reconciliation and harmony of the philosophy of identity, we seem to find a breakthrough in the thesis of the philosophy of identity in this thought of freedom.⁹ Certainly, the definition of tragedy in the *Philosophy of Art* emphasizes human freedom through the abandonment of the subjective ego, which is in common with the *Philosophical Letters*, and the harmonious and conciliatory character based on the philosophy of identity. However, according to the definition of tragedy and the previous quotation (AAII, 6, 1, 373/SWV 697), the essential element to bring about reconciliation and harmony in tragedy results from the recognition of freedom through struggle and downfall; the harmonious state must be brought about through the proof of freedom. Therefore, both struggle and indifference are shown in a tragic work.

3. Analysis of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the Tragic Sublime

Although Schelling deals with several tragic works in *Philosophy of Art*,¹⁰ he finds the expression of freedom to be predominant in Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*. That tragedy begins with a scene in which Oedipus, King of Thebes, is given the message of an oracle telling how he can save his kingdom from disaster: by finding the murderer of the previous king, Laius. None of the earlier story that occurred before this scene is given at the beginning of the play, and Oedipus himself is completely unaware of the murder. The carefully calculated plot structure moves from Oedipus's search for the murderer to his discovery of the truth. In Oedipus's past, several characters worked to avoid the horrible prophecy that Oedipus would kill his father, marry

⁹ Matsuyama 2014, 136–138.

¹⁰ Schelling lists the three major Greek tragic poets and their works, including Aeschylus's *Eumenides* and *Prometheus Bound*, Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*.

with his own mother, and beget with her that unfortunate line of sons and daughters. Despite this effort, Oedipus is unable to resist the force of fate, and the prophecy is fulfilled. Oedipus finally realizes who he is, admits his guilt, and gouges out his eyes so he could not see the truth.¹¹ Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, praised *Oedipus Tyrannus* for simultaneously expressing the two necessary components of tragedy: 1) reversal (περιπέτεια), in which a well-intentioned action leads to the opposite results, leading from good fortune to bad fortune, making a change to send events in the opposite direction, and 2) recognition (ἀναγνώρισις), is a change from ignorance to knowledge.¹²

Schelling understands Oedipus's guilt not as a mistake but as harm inflicted on him by inevitable fate. It is only after all of the prophecies have been realized that Oedipus recognizes the truth; therefore, "Oedipus's fate thus fulfills itself unknown to him" (AII, 6, 1, 372/SWV 696). According to Schelling, nothing occurs by chance in a tragedy, and everything is necessary. For example, that Oedipus encounters Laius is also "necessary for the fulfillment of fate" (AII, 6, 1, 375/SWV 699). Every action of Oedipus is an inevitable act that fulfills the oracle, which is driven by a destiny beyond his will, although it is seemingly done consciously by free will.

For Schelling, the recognition of freedom clearly occurs in *Oedipus Tyrannus* where Oedipus gouges out his eyes.¹³ What is expressed there is no longer freedom "as mere particularity" in opposition to necessity but freedom that "elevates itself to universality" to the equal of necessity (AII, 6, 1, 373/SWV 697).¹⁴ At this level, "the only genuinely *tragic* element in tragedy" appears (AII, 6, 1, 374/SWV 697).

The recognition of freedom brings about the sublime, which frees and purifies the soul from suffering. According to Schelling, when the tragic hero accepts his fate without doubt, that is, "at the moment of *highest* suffering," he simultaneously enters into "the highest liberation and greatest dispassion [*Leidenslosigkeit*]" (AII, 6, 1, 374/SWV 698). The power of fate, which is absolute, is overcome by the will, becoming no longer absolutely great but only relatively great. When fate and will are equally balanced, "the symbol of the absolutely great, namely, of the sublime disposition [*die erhabene Gesinnung*]" appears (Ibid.). Schelling considers the inevitable guilt of the originally "guiltless guilty person" as "the greatest conceivable misfortune" and the voluntary punishment of this person by his own hand to be "the *sublimity* in the tragedy" (AII, 6, 1, 375/SWV 699). It is only through the sublime act of voluntary acceptance of the punishment for inevitable sin that freedom is elevated to reach necessity, with the highest identity or indifference. The inner disposition of the hero is not subjective but becomes the principle that unifies absolute greatness with the hero himself and makes him act. It is essential for the realization of freedom that the hero's inner disposition be represented as a sublime action,

¹¹ The legend of Oedipus is narrated in Homer's epic poem, but the scene where Oedipus gouges out his eyes is Sophocles's creation. Cf. the translator's commentary of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in: Fujisawa 2000, 142f.

¹² Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a22–1452a33.

¹³ "It was Apollo, Apollo, my friend, who accomplished there cruel, cruel sufferings of mine! And no other hand stuck my eyes, but my own miserable hand!" (1329–1332). Citation from the OCT.

¹⁴ Matsuyama understands that the sorrow of Oedipus (1329–1335) represents the battle between human beings and God, where human beings is elevated to the place where only God should be, and interprets this as the reflection of the philosophy of tragedy in the philosophy of art to the understanding of human beings in Schelling's *Freedom Essay*. Matsuyama 2011, 233f.

sublimity and freedom become inseparable.

Schelling presents the real and ideal sides of genius as follows: the former informs the flow of the infinite into the finite and the latter informs the finite into the infinite, calling each "poesy" (*Poesie*) and "art" (*Kunst*) (AAII, 6, 1, 190/SWV 461). Poesy and art, the two sides of genius, are expressed in works of art as "sublimity" and "beauty" (Ibid.). In other words, sublimity and the beauty each a unity with different directions. However, according to Schelling, there can be neither sublimity without beauty nor beauty without sublimity. The sublime, where it is not beautiful but only horrible, is only "monstrous or adventurous," so it cannot be called the *erhabene* and it requires "limitation" (*Begrenzung*) of beauty (AAII, 6, 1, 196/SWV 468f.). Whether there is more of the unlimited or the limited determines whether the nature of sublimity or beauty is stronger. Relative to the absolute, there is no qualitative opposition between sublimity and beauty, but rather "a quantitative opposition" (AAII, 6, 1, 196/SWV 469).¹⁵ Beauty and the sublime are determined on the basis of the philosophy of identity, which holds that differences among all things are grounded in quantitative difference.

Schelling finds the object of the sublime in both nature and disposition. The sublime of nature is "a sensory object" but one that would cause our faculties to vanish into nothingness in relation to its size or power (AAII, 6, 1, 190f./SWV 462).¹⁶ Like Schiller, Schelling describes a nature that is inaccessible to our powers of comprehension, namely, "the sum of all the blind forces too powerful," and it is "chaos,"¹⁷ and he considers it to be "the fundamental intuition of the sublime" (AAII, 6, 1, 193/SWV 465). The intuition of chaos itself lies within "the intuition of the absolute," and it becomes "symbol of the infinite" (Ibid.).

Referring to Friedrich Schiller's essay *On the Sublime* (1801), Schelling connects the sublime to the infinite.¹⁸ When man can sensitively intuit the immeasurable mass and power of nature, they become only relative infinity, but when man can intuit the true "*absolute grandeur* [*Große*]" within the nature, "the infinity itself," relative infinity becomes "the mirror" to intuit the absolute infinity (AAII, 6, 1, 191/SWV 463). Thus, the "intuition of the truly infinite within the infinite of nature" is the intuition of the sublime, and then the nature becomes the symbol of the infinite itself (Ibid.). The infinite has no form, making it "formlessness" (*Formlosigkeit*) (AAII, 6, 1, 193/SWV 465), but the intuition of the infinite is aesthetically intuited in the external things of nature, and it is called "an aesthetic intuition" (*eine ästhetische Anschauung*) (AAII, 6, 1, 192/SWV 463).¹⁹ Because Schelling's aesthetic intuition is a kind of intellectual intuition, the intuition of the sublime is also included in intellectual intuition. Here, we find a concept of the

¹⁵ A goddess in which beauty dominates is Juno as "sublime beauty," while a goddess in which sublimity dominates is Minerva as "beautiful sublimity" (AAII, 6, 1, 196/SWV 469).

¹⁶ Schelling quotes the two kinds of the notion of sublime from Schiller's *On the Sublime*, but it is not exact quotes, but rather modifications to his own theory. Cf. Schiller, *Über das Erhabene*, 42.

¹⁷ Cf. Ibid. 48.

¹⁸ Cf. Ibid. 46f.

¹⁹ According to Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), the aesthetic intuition is "the intellectual intuition which has become objective" (*die objektiv gewordene intellektuelle [Anschauung]*) (AAI, 9, 1, 325 / SWIII, 625).

sublime that is not based on subjective feelings of pleasure and displeasure.²⁰

The infinite appears in the sublime through the disposition. For Schelling, since “the disposition or the principle by which the finite is reduced to a symbol of the infinite is actually found in the subject,” nature is not sublime in itself, and only in art is the object itself sublime (AAII, 6, 1, 195/SWV 468). In particular, the sublime in tragedy is the sublime of the disposition, and it is called “the genuinely tragically sublime.”

The genuinely tragically sublime depends for just this reason on two conditions, namely, that the moral person capitulate to the forces of nature and simultaneously be victorious through his *inner disposition* [*Gesinnung*]. (AAII, 6, 1, 195/SWV 467)

Nature is overlaid with destiny. The tragic hero is destroyed by misfortune, which is a necessary element of “the ethically sublime” (*das sittlich-Erhabene*) (Ibid.). This is because, just as fate leads Oedipus to his downfall, the struggle against misfortune tests a person’s courage, and when this struggle “neither wins a physical victory nor capitulates morally,” the protagonist emerges as “the symbol of the infinite” that transcends all suffering (Ibid.). Schelling recognizes the truly ideal sublime in the tragedy by Sophocles, seeing that the ethically sublime person who overcomes fate can be embodied in himself only through the disposition of the hero (Ibid.). The triumph of human free will over necessity through the disposition is expressed precisely as the choice not to flee from a harsh fate but to courageously accept punishment like Oedipus.

The higher morality, as seen through the actions of freewill, which is infinite within human beings, is represented in the tragic persona in art. The disposition is not merely a subjective movement of the mind but a morality permeated by infinity, embodied in the person of the tragic hero. Schelling’s idea of high morality, realized through the sublime disposition, corresponds to Schiller’s definition of dignity (*Würde*) as “the expression of a sublime disposition [*erhabene Gesinnung*]” in *On Grace and Dignity* (1793).²¹ As infinite morality exists in integration with the tragic hero, he becomes a symbol of the sublime disposition. Schelling defines the symbol as follows: “Representation of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular **within the particular** is possible only symbolically”; the representation of the absolute in this way is accomplished in art, and its material is sought in mythology (AAII, 6, 1, 145/SWV 406). Universal freedom, namely morality, is united with the particular of Oedipus and presented in the real thing of a tragic work.

The realization of the sublime in the hero is intuited by the spectator through the chorus. Schelling emphasizes the role of the chorus at the end of his theory of tragedy as follows: “it elevates the spectator completely away from the common desire for deception directly into the higher realm of true art and of symbolic portrayal” (AAII, 6, 1, 380/SWV 705). The chorus represents “objectivized reflection accompanying the action,” and “a continuous means of

²⁰ J. F. Courtine also indicates Schiller’s renovation of the notion of sublime; Schelling eliminates the relation to the subject, which since Kant firmly belonged to the definition of the sublime, and thus “the infinite itself” appears in the contemplation of the sublime which Schiller already discussed though without drawing all consequences from it. Courtine 1998, 196f.

²¹ Schiller, *Über Anmut und Würde*, 289.

comfort and reconciliation" (AAII, 6, 1, 380/SWV 706). The conflict between freedom and destiny as played out on stage would be a horrible event, willed with fear, as it is. Tragedy as performed is recaptured and reflected upon by the songs of the chorus, and here, the spectator is not tormented by pain and horror but is guided toward a "more serene reflection" and relieved of "the feeling of pain" (Ibid.). The chorus allows the spectator to intuit the entire noble morality not merely as something terrible but also as something beautiful. The chorus, which alleviates suffering and moves the spectator to emotion, is a mediating device between the play and the spectator, an essential function of tragedy that fosters reconciliation. Schelling praises ancient Greek tragedy as the best version of this form, as modern tragedy lacks chorus.²²

Finally, this paper examines the ontological position of freedom realized in the tragic hero. Katia Hay disagrees with Dieter Jähnig's interpretation of the tragic hero as a "medium" (*Mittel*) or "place" (*Stätte*) for the realization of the true purpose of tragedy; she asserts that "Oedipus does not offer a sacrifice for the representation of an absolute *superhuman* [*übermenschlich*] freedom, but symbolizes [...] the highest realization of the freedom, and the realization of *his* own freedom."²³ As Hay points out, the image of Oedipus that Schelling takes up in his theory of tragedy is not the medium of freedom as something beyond human beings, as Jähnig interprets it, but freedom realized through action by the hero's moral mental, attitude or inner disposition. In line with Schelling's argument, the freedom presented as a symbol in the hero has infinity or universality, but it is not merely ideal: it is real in human beings. Schelling discovers the possibility of realization of this human freedom in the actions of Oedipus. Oedipus fights again and again to defy his fate and finally gains the true freedom through his own downfall. The hero of Greek tragedy possesses "an absoluteness of character" (AAII, 6, 1, 376/SWV 700), where heroes are moral people who are able to perform actions through their own characters: and in this sense, Oedipus is a hero. Schelling finds the "noble, great morality" (*edle und große Sitten*) of Greek tragedy in this image of hero (AAII, 6, 1, 377/SWV 701). In the heroic figure of Greek tragedy, there is a freedom that can be won by humans through action rather than being recognition by or in God.

Conclusion

Schelling took the idea of the recognition of human freedom in *Philosophical Letters* to the fundamental idea of tragedy in the *Philosophy of Art*, and provided a complete theory of tragedy as a theory of an art genre. For Schelling, *Oedipus Tyrannus* is an ideal tragedy that expresses the absolute indifference of freedom and necessity, and at the same time, it embodies the recognition of human freedom. The downfall of the voluntary acceptance of punishment paradoxically recognizes human freedom, and thus the tragic hero becomes a symbol of the sublime, that is, a symbol that presents infinite freedom and high morality as an united whole within itself. The theory of tragedy in the *Philosophy of Art* is a development of the theory of human freedom

²² Schelling criticizes Schiller's *The Bride of Messina* for reviving the chorus. This paper does not discuss the theory of the chorus in detail but it does recognize its role in the amplification of fear. Cf. Matsuyama 2014, 165f.

²³ Hay 2012, 96. Cf. Jähnig 1969, 247f.

presented in *Philosophical Letters*, and it can be understood as an idea that developed under the philosophy of identity. The tragic theory in both works can be interpreted as Schelling's attempt to elucidate freedom as essential and real to human beings.

References

Schelling's Writings in German

For the citations from Schelling's works in this article, I translate original German texts into English by reference to the English translations of Schelling's *Philosophical Letters* by Marti and the *Philosophy of Art* by Stott.

AA: *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. hrsg. im Auftrag der Schelling-Kommission der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976ff.

SW: *Schelling's Sämtliche Werke*. hrsg. von K. F. A. Schelling. Stuttgart/Augsburg 1856–1861.

Schelling's Writings in English Translation

Schelling, F. W. J.: *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Stott, D. W., University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Schelling, F. W. J.: *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, in: *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794–1796)*, trans. Marti, F., Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980, 156–218.

Other Works

Aristotle: *Poetics*, in: *Aristotelis de arte poetica liber* (Oxford Classical Texts), Kassel, R. (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1965.

Courtine, J. F. (1998): Tragödie und Erhabenheit: Die spekulative Interpretation des „König Ödipus“ an der Schwelle des deutschen Idealismus, in: *Die Realität des Wissens und das wirkliche Dasein: Erkenntnisbegründung und Philosophie des Tragischen beim frühen Schelling*, hrsg. von Jantzen, J., *Schellingiana* Bd. 10, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 161–210.

Fuhrmans, H. (1960): Dokumente zur Schellingforschung IV, in: *Kant-Studien*, Bd. 51, Issue 1–4, 14–26.

Fujisawa, N. (2000): The translator's commentary of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in: Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* [in Japanese], trans. Fujisawa, N., Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten.

Hay, K. (2012): *Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns*, Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber.

Jähmig, D. (1969): *Die Wahrheitsfunktion der Kunst, Schelling: die Kunst in der Philosophie*; Bd. 2, Pfullingen: Günther Neske.

Matsumoto, N. and Oka, M. (2008): The translator's note of *Poetics*, in: Aristotle, *Poetics* [in Japanese], trans. Matsumoto, N. and Oka, M., Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten.

Matsuyama, J. (2011): Freiheit und Notwendigkeit: Zur Poetik und Philosophie des Tragischen bei Aristoteles und Schelling, in: *Die Philosophie des Tragischen: Schopenhauer, Schelling, Nietzsche*, hrsg. von Hühn, L., Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 223–246.

Matsuyama, J. (2014): *Philosophy of Tragedy: A Ray of Light of Schelling's Philosophy of Art* [in Japanese], Nara: Kizasu-shobo.

-
- Schiller, F.: *Über Anmut und Würde*, in: *Schillers Werke*, Nationalausgabe, unter Mitwirkung von Koopmann, H., hrsg. von Weise, B., Weimar. Bd. 20, 1962, 251–308.
- Schiller, F.: *Über das Erhabene*, in: *Schillers Werke*, Nationalausgabe, unter Mitwirkung von Koopmann, H., hrsg. von Weise, B., Weimar, Bd. 21, 1963, 38–54.
- Sophocles : *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in: Lloyd-Jones, H. et Wilson. N. G. (ed.), *Sophoclis Fabulae* (Oxford Classical Texts), Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Szondi, P. (1961): *Versuch über das Tragische*, in: *Schriften*, Bd.1, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011, 149–260.